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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine the value that students place on selected aspects of the educational foundations studies. Responses were gathered from 652 undergraduate secondary teacher education students with a rating scale instrument developed for the study. Results indicate a favorable response toward the foundations studies in general. Sociological aspects were valued most highly, followed closely by philosophic aspects. Historical aspects received low evaluations. Sex of student was found to be a significant variable, but major and student teaching experience were not. In conclusion, students view foundational studies as valuable to their professional preparation. (Author)

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Student Attitudes Toward Educational Foundations Studies

by

Lane F. Birkel

One of the questions in teacher education about which a good deal of controversy exists concerns the value of the educational foundations studies to the prospective teacher. Much has been written, both pro and con, regarding this controversy, but opposing sides remain unconvinced by each other's arguments. Occasionally students are asked to evaluate their experiences at some time following the completion of a course in educational foundations, but often the results are inconclusive. Analysis of the data obtained in such evaluations is hampered by a lack of knowledge concerning the attitude of the teacher education student toward educational foundations studies prior to his first exposure to such a study.

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the attitude of students toward selected aspects of educational foundations studies before any formal study in this area was undertaken. In this investigation the educational foundations studies were defined to include the philosophical, historical, and sociological study of education, but not that study commonly included under educational psychology or other areas.

During the 1972-73 school year, 652 students were surveyed regarding their attitudes toward foundational studies. These were determined by asking each student to place a value on certain topics of study, based on their own perception of personal need or value.

In investigating the overall question of student attitude toward study in the foundation areas, several specific questions to be answered were for-

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mulated. These were: Which aspects of educational foundations studies do students believe to be of the most value in preparation for a teaching career? Will the sex of the respondent be a statistically significant variable? Will the major field of study be a statistically significant variable? Will the completion of a student teaching experience result in any statistically significant differences in the responses? A null hypotheses was formulated for each of the last three questions above for the purpose of statistical treatment.

Procedure

The instrument used to assess attitudes of students was developed specifically for this study. The items on the questionnaire were chosen from a large group of activities and objectives in educational foundations studies. Two pilot studies conducted during the previous year assisted in the development of the items. A pilot study of approximately fifty students provided information regarding clarity of instructions and possible descriptive statements. Six items in each of the three foundations areas were selected for a second pilot study of 145 students. Responses were punched on computer cards, and an analysis of these responses was done through correlation and factor analysis, using a rotated factor matrix. Items were modified or re-written in instances where such analysis indicated that students did not clearly perceive a difference between the three foundational areas.

The subjects for this study were 652 secondary teacher education students enrolled in Ball State University at the junior or senior level during the 1972-1973 academic year. These subjects were distributed approximately equally among the three academic quarters. None had previously taken any foundations of education course other than educational psychology. Data was gathered from randomly selected class groups on the first day of each quarter.

Sex, student teaching status, and major field of study were determined for each subject. The 282 male students represented 43.3 percent of the sample, and 370 female students comprised 56.7 percent. Of the total group, 152 (or 23.3 percent) had completed student teaching, while the remaining

500 (or 76.7 percent) had not. The breakdown of subjects according to major field of study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Major Field of Study of Subjects

Major	No. of Students	% of Total
Applied Arts (including Business, P.E., Ind. Arts, Home Ec.)	198	30%
Language Arts and Communication	137	21%
History and Social Sciences	117	18%
Fine Arts (including Art and Music)	69	11%
Physical and Biological Sciences	41	6%
Mathematics	34	5%
Other (Special educ., double majors, misc.)	56	9%

The subjects were asked to respond to the question "How much value to a prospective teacher like yourself is there in _____?" followed by a descriptive statement of some aspect of educational foundations studies.

The subjects responded on a four-point scale, with 4 = much value, 3 = some value, 2 = little value, and 1 = no value. A total of eighteen descriptive statements, divided equally among historical, philosophical, and sociological foundations of education, were used in the study.

The data gathered in the study was punched on computer cards. The processing of these furnished an individual item analysis, totals, mean scores for each item, and an analysis of variance for each item using sex, major field of study, and student teaching experience as variables.

Results

In general, the students responded quite favorably toward educational foundations studies. As indicated in Table 1, the modal response for each of the eighteen items was either "much value" or "some value." In 81.3 percent of the instances, students selected one or the other of these two most favorable responses. Shown in the totals for Table 2, 41.4 percent of the responses were in the highest category ("Much Value"), and 39.9 percent were in the second category ("Some Value"). Only 15.7 percent of the responses indicated little value in the study of various aspects of educational foundations. The number of responses indicating no value in a particular item was almost negligible, comprising only three percent of the total response.

An examination of the eighteen items individually reveals that nine of the items received a modal response of "Much Value," with the remaining nine items receiving a modal response of "Some Value." This would seem to indicate a fairly high regard by students for foundational studies at this point in their preparation for teaching. By assigning a weight of 4, 3, 2, or 1 to the four categories of responses, a numerical mean was computed for each item. The descriptive statements in Table 2 are arranged in descending order according to their mean response. The overall mean response for all items combined was 3.195 (with 4.000 being the highest possible score).

One item in particular was judged by students to be of value to their preparation for teaching. This concerned an awareness of differing behaviors and values of the various social classes. Slightly more than 80 percent of the students gave this item the highest possible evaluation. Other topics for study

Table 2

Summary of Responses to Descriptive Statements
in Educational Foundations Studies

Descriptive Statement	Number of Students: Much Value	Some Value	Little Value	No Value	Mean
1. An awareness of the differing behavior patterns and values among different social classes.	528* (81)	107 (16)	15 (2)	2	3.781
2. A study of the various social and ethnic minorities in our society--their attitudes, values and problems--and the importance of these to education.	399 (61)	220 (34)	25 (4)	8 (1)	3.549
3. A consideration of such questions as school integration and equality of educational opportunity.	389 (58)	221 (34)	35 (5)	16 (1)	3.525
4. An inquiry into what it means to be human, and the resulting implications for learning and teaching.	378 (58)	195 (30)	71 (11)	7 (1)	3.443
5. An inquiry into the purpose of education.	375 (58)	197 (30)	64 (10)	15 (2)	3.432
6. A consideration of ethical and moral questions in human life, and the relationship of the school curriculum to these questions.	338 (52)	233 (36)	71 (11)	9 (1)	3.382
7. A study of the relationship between the school and our society today, including the school's contribution in transmitting or changing the way of life of the society.	317 (49)	250 (38)	72 (11)	10 (2)	3.342
8. An examination of the attitudes and values of the adolescent subculture, and of the "generation gap" between youth and adult society.	317 (49)	248 (38)	73 (11)	13 (2)	3.335
9. An understanding of the background and prior events that lead up to our current problems in education.	255 (39)	309 (48)	74 (11)	9 (1)	3.247
10. A search for a deeper meaning of such concepts as relevance, reality, knowledge, and education.	274 (42)	265 (41)	93 (14)	19 (3)	3.220
11. An analysis of the role of the individual teacher and teacher organizations in the community and larger society today.	244 (37)	291 (45)	100 (15)	16 (3)	3.172
12. An attempt at forming a consistent viewpoint or philosophy as an educator that will serve to guide the actual practice of teaching.	293 (45)	210 (32)	103 (16)	44 (7)	3.157

*Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Table 2, continued

13.	An awareness of the past educational experience, both accomplishments and injustices, of various cultural groups in America	164 (25)	329 (51)	128 (20)	24 (4)	2.981
14.	A study of the forces and conditions of the past that have shaped our present educational system.	119 (18)	353 (54)	159 (24)	19 (3)	2.876
15.	An inquiry into the process of change based on an examination of past events and trends in education.	119 (18)	328 (50)	183 (28)	20 (3)	2.840
16.	A study of various recognized systems of thought that influence our current educational practice, such as essentialism, pragmatism, and existentialism.	131 (20)	300 (46)	191 (30)	29 (4)	2.819
17.	An acquaintance with the ideas and accomplishments of outstanding teachers and educational leaders of the past.	121 (19)	301 (46)	182 (28)	48 (7)	2.759
18.	A knowledge of how our present curriculum, teaching methods, and forms of school organization came into existence.	91 (14)	315 (48)	196 (30)	49 (8)	2.688
	TOTALS	4,852	4,672	1,835	357	3.195

which were highly rated concerned the education of social and ethnic minorities, and questions of school integration and equal educational opportunity.

Among the items that received the lowest evaluations were those concerning systems of philosophic thought, educational leaders of the past, and the history of school organization, curriculum and methods. While these topics received the lowest ratings, each of them did receive an evaluation of "Much Value" or "Some Value" by more than 60 percent of the students. Even at the lower end of the scale a fairly high regard for the foundations studies seems to exist.

It was not the purpose of this investigation to determine student attitude toward each of the three foundational studies by grouping the individual items and comparing each group to the others. However, an examination of Table 2 clearly reveals a student preference for the sociological aspects of educational foundations studies. The first three items fall into this foundations area, as do the seventh, eighth, and eleventh. Philosophic aspects rated fairly high, placing in the fourth, fifth, and sixth highest positions. The comparatively low ranking of formulating one's own philosophy (item no. 12) was somewhat of a surprise, however. The historical aspects of the study of education clearly received the lowest ratings. Only one item, concerning the background of current problems in education (no. 9), received a mean response above the overall mean of 3.195.

The responses were also examined to determine whether sex of respondent, choice of major field of study, or completion of a student teaching experience would be a statistically significant variable. In eight of the eighteen items, sex of respondent was found to be a statistically significant variable. The hypothesis of no difference in response between the sexes was rejected at the .01

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level of confidence. In every instance, the difference involved a more positive response by female students. No item was valued significantly higher by males as a group. All of the items describing the sociological study of education were valued significantly higher by females. Two of the items describing a philosophical study of education were valued significantly higher by females. None of the items describing the historical study of education were valued significantly higher by either sex. Significant differences based on sex are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Significant Differences in Mean Response According to Sex

Item no.	Descriptive Statement[a]	Mean Response Male	Mean Response Female	F-ratio
1	Social Class Differences	3.720	3.827	7.8698**
2	Social and Ethnic Minorities	3.390	3.670	33.0817**
3	Integration and Equality	3.397	3.627	20.9737**
4	Inquiry into "human-ness"	3.323	3.535	13.1247**
6	Ethical and Moral Questions	3.223	3.508	24.8421**
7	School-Society Relationship	3.245	3.424	9.2602**
8	Adolescent Subculture	3.174	3.462	24.1369**
12	Role of Teacher(s) in Society	3.057	3.265	11.6991**

[a]Statements are abbreviated here. Complete statements are included in Table 1.

**Difference significant at the .01 level.

As described earlier, respondents were asked to indicate their major field of study by selecting one of seven previously determined categories. The responses were analyzed to determine whether or not the student's major field of study would be a statistically significant variable. In five of the eighteen items a significant difference was found, altho no consistent pattern of responses emerged as was the case when sex was the independent variable. Table 4 summarizes the data from these five items.

Table 4
Significant Differences in Mean Response
According to Major

Item No.	Lang.Arts-Comm.	Soc.Sci-History	Sciences	Math	Applied Arts	Fine Arts	Other	F-ratio
	Mean Response by Major							
2	(Social and Ethnic Minorities)							
	3.606	3.641	3.488	3.412	3.424	3.609	3.714	3.0180**
7	(School-Society Relationship)							
	3.372	3.402	3.000	3.059	3.374	3.377	3.464	2.7498*
14	(Past Conditions Shaping Present)							
	2.781	2.786	2.659	2.882	2.960	2.928	3.125	2.8243**
16	(Systems of Thought)							
	2.745	3.103	2.585	2.559	2.737	2.942	2.911	4.6678**
17	(Accomplishments of Past Educators)							
	2.686	2.556	2.805	3.059	2.854	2.754	2.839	2.4713*

*Difference significant at the .05 level.

**Difference significant at the .01 level.

On the two descriptive statements that were primarily sociological (#2, Social and Ethnic Minorities; #7, School-Society Relationships), History and Social Science majors gave a favorable response, while math and science majors valued these items considerably less. Applied arts majors were also comparatively less favorable to a study of various social and ethnic minorities, although the lowest mean responses to this item were still quite high.

A similar pattern was found in regard to the study of philosophic systems in education. History and social science majors gave the most favorable response, and math and science majors again were least favorable.

An examination of the two items which concern historical aspects of education showed a surprising break in this pattern. History and social science majors valued the study of accomplishments of past educators (item #17) lowest of any of the groups. Equally surprising was the highest rating of this topic being given by math majors. History and Social Science majors also placed a low value on the other historical descriptor, item #7, which involved past conditions which influences our present educational system. An unexplained result of this part of the survey showed the "Other" category (Special education majors, double majors that fell into two disparate fields, and miscellaneous) giving the most favorable response of all categories in three of the five items where significant differences were found.

The third variable to be examined concerned the completion of a student teaching experience. Since all of the data was gathered at the beginning of the academic quarter, each subject had either no substantial student teaching experience, or had completed it entirely. In only one of the eighteen items

was a significant difference between the responses of the two groups found. This difference, significant at the .05 level only, involved the study of ideas and accomplishments of past educators (item #17). Those who had completed student teaching valued this topic somewhat higher, with a mean response of 2.888 compared to 2.720 for the non-student teaching group.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest a generally positive attitude of the subjects toward the educational foundations studies as a whole. This is indicated by a relatively high overall mean response (3.195 on a four-point scale), and by the highest response being selected more often than any other in the total investigation. Further, on even the lowest-rated items nearly two out of three students saw some value, and the three percent rejection rate ("no value") is very low.

Sociological aspects of the foundational studies received the most positive response. All but one of the items in this category exceeded the overall mean response for the entire study. The high value that students place on this area may possibly reflect the widespread emphasis on social concerns during the past decade.

Philosophic aspects of the foundational studies are also valued quite highly, with four of the six items obtaining a mean response higher than the overall mean. Students, strongly distinguished among various aspects of this foundational area, however. Questions of human nature and purpose in education were especially valued. This response is probably correlative with the high value placed on social concerns described above. On the other hand, study of philosophic systems received one of the lowest ratings of the entire investigation. Students may possibly see formal study of philosophy as divorced from genuine human concerns, which would be very unfortunate.

Historical aspects of the foundational studies clearly were valued lowest, with all but one item falling below the overall mean. This item, concerning the background of current problems in education, probably describes the only way in which many students see value in the history of education, i.e. as related to an understanding of problems of the present time. The comparatively low value placed

on the historical category as a whole may reflect the strong present-orientation of many young people today.

Two findings stand out clearly when the responses are analyzed by sex. First, a strong association between females and sociological concerns was evidenced. Second, females always gave the more positive response throughout the entire study when significant differences between responses of males and females were found. Data from this study cannot furnish reasons for these findings, but it may be speculated that they are due to the traditional role of the female in our society. This role is one that has been dedicated to social service, and also one that has been more submissive, and therefore more accepting, than the male role.

When the responses are examined according to the student's major field of study, no overall pattern emerges, and therefore no conclusive findings can be claimed. Some significant differences in response were found, but in thirteen out of eighteen items there was none. Furthermore, the findings were somewhat confusing where significant difference were found, e.g. history and social science majors valuing the historical study of education quite low in some cases, and mathematics majors placing a high value on the same items.

One of the unexpected findings of the study was that the practical experience of student teaching had almost no influence in the attitude of the subjects toward educational foundations studies. In only one instance out of eighteen was a significant difference found at the .05 level, and none was found at the .01 level. Perhaps the student teacher is too caught up in merely surviving in the classroom and in the technical aspects of teaching to be reflective about sociological or philosophical questions. This finding cannot be interpreted to negate the value of practical experience in subsequent theoretical study, however. In the one item

in which a significant difference was found, those subjects with student teaching experience placed a higher value on the ideas and accomplishments of past educators than students who had not had this experience. It is probable that actual experience with the struggles and frustrations of teaching leads the young teacher to value the accomplishments of other teachers more than before.

The findings of this study appear to have the following implications for the teacher education curriculum and course design: Foundational studies are an important part of the teacher education curriculum, meeting the expressed needs of students. In the designing of an educational foundations course for undergraduates, sociological concerns in education might be used as a basis for organization and as a source of problems and situations to be examined. Philosophic questions might arise in the examination of these social concerns and be pursued fruitfully. The historical aspect of such a course would serve as a background for the particular topics under consideration <u>at the time they are being studied</u>, rather than being studied as a separate subject matter in and of itself.

Several questions that are not answered by this investigation suggest further research. Altho an association between female students and sociological concerns was shown to be present, causative factors for this association were not determined. Nor were reasons found for the general aversion t[illegible]istorical studies. Explanations for these findings might be sought. While the completion of a student teaching experience does not seem to affect the attitude of a student prior to entering an educational foundations course, additional study is needed to determine whether or not such experience facilitates learning in the foundations areas. Finally, further research might compare entering and leaving attitudes of students in an undergraduate foundations course to measure any changes occurring during formal study in the educational foundations.